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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0787  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0663  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 2969  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1242  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S BERDIMUHAMEDOV IN BRUSSELS: A BRIEF  
DEBRIEF

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Berdimuhamedov's November 5-7 visit to Brussels seemed to reinforce that Turkmenistan is following its own path and, as yet, has little interest in the kinds of outward-looking compromises that could make it truly an international player. In energy, Berdimuhamedov significantly enunciated a new position. He said, "If it is in our strategic interest to reduce natural gas volumes to Russia and China to meet European demand, we will do so." The EU agreed to open a full EU Delegation presence in Ashgabat by 2009 or 2010. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) Charge met with French Ambassador Christian Lechervy on November 12 for a read-out of President Berdimuhamedov's November 5-7 visit to Brussels (France is the EU contact embassy in Ashgabat). Lechervy said most of the meetings were set pieces with well-known positions rehearsed by both sides.

TURKMEN GAS TO EUROPE

14. (SBU) In Brussels, Berdimuhamedov restated Turkmenistan's familiar policy that it sells its gas at its border, and it's up to others to get it out. He cited the Chinese as an excellent model of cooperation: "They know what they want and are building the pipeline." He reportedly complained, as usual, that the Europeans and Americans only "talk at him" but refuse to present a concrete proposal for a pipeline to Europe. EU Energy Commissioner Piebalgs replied to Berdimuhamedov private companies cannot commit to investments that would include expensive new pipelines if they don't know the volume of natural gas reserves. Berdimuhamedov vowed he personally guarantees the volumes exist, and investors must trust his word. However, he said, "If it is in our strategic interest to reduce volumes to Russia and China to meet European demand, we will do so." He also confirmed he has told Russian President Putin that he now wants \$150 per thousand cubic meters, instead of the current \$100 that Gazprom pays. (NOTE: This is still more than \$100 below market prices. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) Lechervy described as "wishful thinking" rumors that Turkmenistan and the EU signed in Brussels a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on energy. He clarified that the EU offered the text of an MOU similar to the one signed with Kazakhstan four or five months ago, but the Turkmenistanis said only they would study it.

16. (U) Energy Commissioner Piebalgs will attend the Turkmenistan International Oil and Gas Exhibition in Ashgabat on November 15. His official delegation will include representatives from BP, Total, and OMV (Austria).

#### HUMAN RIGHTS

17. (U) According to Lechervy, the Europeans diplomatically chided Berdimuhamedov for not acting on "lists they have submitted to him for action." Reportedly, Berdimuhamedov took it in stride.

18. (SBU) Charge suggested the United States and the EU should join forces, under the auspices of the UN, to submit a combined list soonest so that Turkmenistan has time to take at least some action before the UN International Conference to commemorate the opening of the UN Preventative Diplomacy Center in Ashgabat, December 10-12. Lechervy was sympathetic but questioned whether there would be time for full coordination with the EU at this late date, since all member states must concur, and "that could take months."

#### BUSINESS

19. (SBU) The Belgian corporation ENEX sponsored a business dinner for Berdimuhamedov that 150 mostly European business representatives attended. Berdimuhamedov arrived late, and then apparently did the same power-point presentation he used at the Eurasia Group luncheon

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in September in New York. Lechervy commented the signals were "at best mixed."

110. (SBU) Berdimuhamedov spent 20 minutes touting the Avaza Tourist Zone development project near Turkmenbashi on the Caspian coast. Lechervy commented that the grandiose project is a "Soviet-style fantasy" that was an ide fixe of former President Niyazov. In the late 1990s, Club Mediterranean looked into the proposal, "but ran away laughing." Lechervy said Turkmenistan gives no indication it is willing to relax its draconian, intelligence-agency-controlled visa regime and has no serious plans, despite generalized statements to the contrary, to rebuild the Turkmenbashi airport which "has no decent air traffic control, no ability to receive modern aircraft, a highly dangerous tarmac, no fire-fighting service, and no international-standard refueling capability." Lechervy mused that at best Avaza will be an "upscale Soviet sanatoria project, circa 1983." That said, the French construction firm Bouygues will participate "for profit."

111. (SBU) Adding to the "mixed signals" evaluation, Lechervy said the French citizen manager of DGTL Logistics, servicing the oil and gas industry, a long-time resident in Turkmenistan, was denied re-entry at the Ashgabat airport on November 9 when returning from his regional headquarters in Dubai. He was detained at the airport for 24 hours and then deported with no explanation. Lechervy noted this follows on the heels of the deportation of the Turkish-Turkmen Hospital's English-speaking and international-standard Jordanian physician, Dr. Yahyah, two weeks ago.

#### EDUCATION

112. (SBU) Lechervy said Berdimuhamedov made education a key point of his presentations, saying he wants Turkmenistan to reach international standards as soon as possible. But, Berdimuhamedov reportedly added, "We do not need assistance. We need your support for our goal." Lechervy questioned what Berdimuhamedov means by support, noting Turkmenistan has rejected four of five EU-TACIS offers of cooperation on education.

113. (SBU) COMMENT: We'd suggest there might be an element of Gallic world-weariness in this read-out. However, it does not

radically depart from our own close observations in recent months. It seems what we need to understand is Turkmenistan under Berdimuhamedov chooses to follow its own path and is not necessarily open to cooperation in the sense of meeting-of-the-minds middle ground. Sometimes it almost seems Turkmenistan's position is "Do it our way, or bye-bye." Opportunities for positive cooperation do indeed exist, and will sometimes pop up unexpectedly -- e.g., State TV recently asking for U.S. expert trainers. It is essential we remain optimistic, but we need more than ever to try to figure out how to couch our positions in terms that make sense to the current powers that be in Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND